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ABSTRACT

Both British and American social welfare systems rely on volunteers during the financially constrained years of the 1980's. To investigate how London and New York agencies recruit, screen, train, use, and evaluate social services volunteers, surveys were completed by 44 New York agencies (a 46 percent response rate; 17 public, 27 private), and by 55 London agencies (45, or 28 percent were adequate for data analysis; 12 public, 32 private). An analysis of the results showed that more New York agencies (89 percent) used volunteers than did London agencies (66 percent). Overall, recruitment, screening, orientation/training, and evaluation/recognition methods were similar. For recruitment, both agencies used personal contact, churches, religious organizations, and brochures. Prospective volunteers were asked for basic identifying information as well as interests and references. Agencies screened applicants by interview, application forms, and letters of reference, and in London through probationary periods. Orientation programs, consisting of on-the-job training and meetings/lectures, were provided in all London agencies, and by 32 of the 39 New York agencies recruiting volunteers. Out-of-pocket expenses were reimbursed in London but not New York. Volunteers were predominantly female and were supervised by a designated member of the professional staff; they provided direct services to clients and some clerical services. Observation was the primary method of performance evaluation and a letter of appreciation was the most popular method of recognition, although New York agencies provided such recognition more frequently than London agencies. Future volunteer programs should take into consideration these variables in developing satisfying programs for their volunteers. (BL)

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THE UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEERS:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LONDON AND NEW YORK CITY

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In characterizing social services, the 1960's were called the decade of growth and the 70's the decade of accountability. If one could forecast the remaining years of the 80's, given the pattern of the initial years, this decade might be dubbed the decade of resourcefulness. Lean, austere, bare-bones, these are a few of the adjectives applied to describe the current budgets of social welfare agencies throughout the country. In reading these introductory sentences, the natural assumption would be that the country being discussed is the United States; however, if one was to analyze the British system today, a similar description would apply. In both countries business as usual is no longer a possibility as agencies and organizations encounter continued inflation and reduction in government funding.

Traditionally, the United States has been influenced through English laws, customs, procedures, and in fact, the roots of social welfare policies can easily be traced across the Atlantic (Axinn and Levin, 1982; Erikson, 1981; Morris, 1974). Given the British are also experiencing a period of constraint on public expenditures resulting in financial cutbacks, staff shortages, increased caseloads, and renewed interest in the reform or service delivery, their reactions should be more than a passing interest. The differences in geography, history, political structure, public attitudes, and culture prevent the direct transference of reforms from one country to the other. Since the British and American social welfare systems share a common origin, an awareness of the approaches each has selected to deal with these concerns may have immediate relevance to the other.

If traditional modes of services are not longer applicable, what alternatives are available to maintain quality in this period of scarcity and retrenchment? Suggestions being discussed in the literature and by social

welfare administrators in both countries include such procedures as tightening eligibility requirements to reduce client enrollment, abandoning preventive principles and returning to strictly rehabilitative services, or determining who should be helped by adopting the military concept of triage (Edelwich and Brodsky, 1980). A far less radical option, an option that would maintain or possibly even increase services, is the effective utilization of volunteers.

Previous research in England and the United States concerning voluntee ism placed a heavy emphasis on examining the volunteer in terms of who volunteers and why, rather than on an analysis of volunteer programs and their impact on consumers (Edwards and White, 1980; Holme and Maizels, 1978; LaCour, 1976; Nightingale, 1973; Qureshi, et al., 1979; Scioli and Cook, 1976). This presentation focuses on the implementation of the common components identified by LaCour (1976) by examining how a number of agencies in London and New York recruit, screen, train, utilize and evaluate volunteers. While conducting this research which included a survey analysis, the authors concluded that there are distinctive trends in the implementation of these common components. Because these trends may have a direct relationship to the effectiveness of volunteer programs, a closer examination may provide a springboard for the development or revitalization of volunteer programs and has implications for enriching service delivery in both countries.

Stratified random samples were drawn in both New York and London. In New York, 95 agencies and organizations were selected from The Directory of Social and Health Agencies of New York City 1979-80 (McDade, 1980). In London, 162 agencies and organizations were identified from three sources, (1) Voluntary Organizations: An NCVO Directory, 1982-1983; (2) Social Work in Britain, 1950-1975 by E. Younghusband (1978); and (3) personal communication with Jayne Parkin of the National Institute for Social Work. A cover letter,

survey, and self-addressed envelope were sent to each agency and organization in the samples.

Before presenting a comparative analysis, a word of caution is in order about the generalization of these survey results from the specific cities to their respective countries. The findings reflect New York City and London and do not specifically mirror volunteerism in other cities in the United States and England.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Within the delimitation described, 44 New York agencies (46%) responded to the survey and were sufficiently completed to be used for data analysis. Of the 44 agencies, 17 (39%) were public (statutory), while 27 (61%) were in the private sector. Fifty-five responses (34%) were received from London agencies; however, only 45 (28%) were sufficiently completed to be used for data analysis. Of the agencies surveyed, 12 (27%) were public (statutory), while 32 (73%) were in the private sector. Table 1 identifies the types of services provided by the agencies in both cities. One problem inherent in categorizing agencies according to services delivered is that many agencies provide more than one service. In this area of research, this is not unique as evidenced by Carter's study of Canadian social service agencies (1975). Table 1, therefore, reflects the provision of 96 distinct services available from the 45 London agencies and 107 services provided by the 44 New York agencies.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, AND ORIENTATION

Volunteers as defined by the survey instrument are those individuals who work in a social service agency without remuneration. Of the responses received, the number of New York agencies (89%) utilizing volunteers was

significantly greater than the number of London agencies (66%) utilizing volunteers. In both cities, however, methods of recruitment were similar. The most frequent method reported was personal contact which is consistent with previous research in the United States and England as well as in other countries (Carter, 1975; Griffiths, 1981; Hayler, 1975; Parker and LaCour, 1978; Sheier, 1977). In addition to personal contacts, there also seems to be an emphasis on recruitment through churches and religious organizations and brochures. Responses listed under "other" refer to informal recruiting arrangements which request volunteers from schools, colleges and universities, as well as business and civic organizations.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

As shown in Table 3, some agencies ask prospective volunteers for a statement concerning leisure interests and letters of reference in addition to the basic information of name, address, telephone number, age, sex, and, race. It is interesting to note that few agencies inquire about one's history of criminal offenses. Information about personal income is not required by any of the agencies surveyed and personality/behavioral tests are rarely utilized.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

In each city, 82% of the agencies screen volunteer applicants. the dominant method of screening is the interview (over 75%) followed in New York by application forms (47%) and letters of reference (31%) and in London by letters of reference (46%) and probationary periods (46%). The number of agencies utilizing self-evaluation mechanisms and test instruments is not significant in either case.

Some type of orientation or training program is provided by 32 of 39 New York agencies recruiting volunteers, whereas all 29 London agencies utilizing volunteers provide some type of orientation or training program. In both cities the number of hours as well as the methods of training vary. In New York the number of hours of training range from 2-25 as opposed to 6-50 hours in London. The most prevalent methods reported by both groups are on-the-job training and meetings/lectures.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY AND SUPERVISION

The majority of volunteers are female as indicated by 59% of the New York agencies and 66% of the London agencies. The vast majority of volunteers provide direct service to clients and work primarily with the professional staff (see Table 4). In addition, many volunteers are involved in clerical/administrative tasks. For the most part, they provide a minimum of two hours of service per week, often without a formal job description. Data analysis reveals that many agencies (68%) in the New York sample do not reimburse volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses for providing services. The opposite is true in London where 93% of the agencies surveyed do reimburse volunteers.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

It appears that volunteers are primarily supervised by an individual designated as the coordinator of volunteers. In both samples, at least 67% of the agencies have at least one individual with this title. In most instances, coordinators are full-time paid employees. In New York, the majority of coordinators are female (81%) and represent a variety of academic backgrounds; however, social work at the masters level appears to be the predominant field of study. In London, the coordinators are almost equally divided in terms of sex and have varied academic backgrounds with an emphasis in the social sciences.

Some supervision of volunteers occurred in over 80% of each sample. It is apparent from the data that the number of times volunteers meet with coordinators varies according to need. In providing services, it is interesting to note that many volunteers work independently except for help in troublesome situations. Those who did report a regularity of conferences, consultations, and staff development activities meet on an average of once a month.

EVALUATION AND RECOGNITION

Observation by the professional staff is the primary method of evaluating the performance of volunteers in both groups. While the use of standardized evaluation forms is negligible, a number of agencies report that performance is evaluated by record keeping and feedback from clients.

A letter of appreciation is the most popular method of recognition in both samples, followed closely by certificates of merit in New York and annual luncheons/dinners in London. Suprisingly, 24% of the agencies surveyed in London offered no formal recognition as compared to 3% in New York. Several respondents specified other rewards such as self-satisfaction, references, and free tickets to fund-raising events while London respondents specified that human enrichment and self-satisfaction were rewards in and of themselves.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Both samples provide evidence of a limited amount (under 50%) of evaluation/research to justify the use of volunteers. Cost analyses, surveys, and staff performance analyses are identified as methods implemented by several agencies; however, frequently those who did report evaluation/research activity neglected to specify any particular method. If the follow-up of

volunteer drop-outs is considered an evaluation mechanism, it is interesting to note that over half of the agencies in New York and London use this procedure. The letter of inquiry is reported as the most common method.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A comparison of volunteerism in these two cities presents many similarities and a few significant differences. In reviewing the common components of volunteer programs, the methods of recruitment, screening, orientation/training, and evaluation/recognition are the same. Although the basic information requested of volunteer applicants is similar, the information not requested is also similar. What volunteers do and how they are supervised are identical in both cities.

In each case volunteer activity often occurs without a distinctive job description. This absence is disturbing since volunteers may be confused in terms of their relationship with clients, professionals, and agencies. From the professionals' perspective, their expectations of volunteers may be vastly different from that of volunteers. This could easily lead to conflict in terms of service delivery, supervision, and evaluation.

Although methods of orientation/training are the same in each case, the length as well as the audience differ. In London, it appears that the duration of training is longer and the recipients are both volunteers and professionals. With volunteers being perceived as a supportive resource for meeting increasing human needs, their utilization necessitates an investment of time and effort on the part of professionals. The quality of work performed by volunteers not only depends on their efforts but also on the professional staff working with them. In London, some agency administrators emphasize the necessity for training professionals to work with volunteers and are willing to provide this type of training. This approach might alleviate some of the potential conflict between volunteers and professionals and enhance overall service delivery.

Another significant difference concerns the issue of reimbursement of volunteers. Based on the responses from the London sample, the majority of agencies do reimburse their volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses. In New York, it appears that reimbursement is not provided in many cases. An awareness of agencies of the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers may be evidence of further commitment to volunteerism. This concern and support for volunteers may act as a positive force by increasing job satisfaction, enhancing the image of agencies, and deterring drop-outs.

Recognition is an essential component of volunteer programs, however, one-fourth of the London sample reported an absence of formal recognition as compared to three percent of the New York sample. This may have implications concerning the drop-out rate and closer investigation of the connection between recognition and withdrawal may be beneficial to volunteerism. Another issue to consider is the type of recognition. People who volunteer are motivated by a variety of factors. A consideration of the motvies of each volunteer may lead to more appropriate reward systems. In general, there appears to be a greater chance for positive experiences for volunteers and agencies if agency professionals are cognizant of human diversity.

One generalization of volunteerism that is confirmed by the results in both cities is that typically volunteers are female. In London the individuals designated as coordinators are equally divided in terms of sex, while in New York, they are predominantly female. Several London agencies expressed a need for greater male participation in voluntary efforts and reported a concerted effort to increase male involvement (Gordon-Spencer, 1982; Moran, 1982). In addition to the potential benefits of participation as volunteers, increasing male involvement is important in terms of broadening the skill bank and facilitating a more appropriate match of clients and volunteers.

Finally, the authors do not want to convey the impression that one system is superior to another. Rather, by emphasizing the similarities and differences of two approaches, there is hope that exposure to new ideas will generate a process whereby examination and possible adaptation occur. Thus, both systems benefit.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The results of this study not only reinforce previous research, but also present some new ideas. In addition, there are questions that require further investigation. Specifically, there is a need to replicate the study with other samples, i.e., other urban areas as well as rural localities. Other international comparisons might also assist researchers in identifying differences and similarities, thus enabling them to identify the more productive aspects of volunteerism.

Another area of possible research concerns the following question: can volunteers replace professionals in providing some services or will they continue to fulfill basically a complementary role? This is a volatile issue that demands attention in a time of economic scarcity, since an increase in the utilization of volunteers may be used as a justification for decreased spending in social services as well as cutbacks in professional staff (Reisch and Wenocur, 1982). In addition, with the increased emphasis on the utilization of volunteers, what are the ramifications to agencies in terms of budget, staff time, and training during a period of reduced funding in social services?

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TABLE 1

NUMBER OF AGENCIES PROVIDING SPECIFIC SERVICES

Main Area of Service	New York	London
Corrections	3	3
Children's Services	33	19
Services for the Elderly	17	20
Mental Health	12	15
Public Relief	1	4
Public Housing	3	2
Drug/Alcohol	4	5
Education	21	13
Information and Referral	3	6
Handicapped	3	4
Generalist Helping	7	5

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES UTILIZING VARIOUS RECRUITMENT METHODS

Method	New York	London
Radio/TV	23	30
Brochures	38	47
Churches and Religious Organizations	49	40
Personal Contacts	92	100
Special Campaigns	21	40
Subcontracts with Voluntary Organizations	38	30
Newspapers	8	23
Other	18	10

Note: Respondents were asked to mark as many methods as applicable to their agency.

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES REQUIRING CERTAIN TYPES OF INFORMATION

Type of Information	New York	London
Name, Address, Telephone Number	100	97
Age, Sex, Race	62	55
Leisure Interests	67	34
Number of Children	15	24
Spouse's Employment	10	0
Religious Affiliation	5	21
Income	0	0
Letters of Reference	56	45
History of Criminal Offenses	15	10
Personality/Behavioral Tests	3	7
Previous Experience	13	10
Other*	28	14

* Specific skills, availability, and health status

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES REPORTING DIFFERENT VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Activities	New York	London
Direct Service	90	89
Clerical/Administrative Tasks	59	64
Fund Raising	46	43
Transportation	20	54
Policymaking	21	21
Advocacy	36	14
Other	8	21

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES UTILIZING VARIOUS
TYPES OF REWARD AND RECOGNITION

Type	New York	London
Publicity	28	20
Letters of Appreciation	59	55
"Promotions"	5	0
Annual Luncheon/Dinner	33	31
Certificate of Merit	56	20
Financial Awards	3	0
None	3	24
Other	13	24